

‘My God Is Modi Ji’

The Religious Representations in the Facebook Following of Narendra Modi

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat</p> <p>In this study the religious representations in the Facebook following of India's current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, are explored and analysed. The study is a theoretically informed netnographic study and its background is in the previous studies of charisma and the concept of natural religion or natural cognitions related to religion. On the essentialist–social constructionism scale the study situates itself in the essentialist end, treating the research material as an expression of the reality behind it, not just as socially constructed. As far as is known, this study is the first study using online material to analyse religious representations in the following of a secular leader figure.</p> <p>The research material, or data, for this study comes from Narendra Modi's official Facebook fan page http://www.facebook.com/narendramodi.official and the comments on it. A total of 6,617 comments were manually collected from the fan page on four separate dates: 6 November 2012, 20 November 2012, 20 July 2014 and 6 August 2014. After the collection of the comments, a software tool in python language was written to index the comments. The nature of social media, and the Internet in general, makes it mandatory to treat the research material as a mere snapshot of Modi's rapidly changing Facebook fan page and not as a continuously existing mass of data.</p> <p>The different years for the material gathering represent two different political and social positions of Modi. In 2012 he was the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat and a popular Prime Minister candidate. In 2014 his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), won the general election, which consequently made Modi the Prime Minister of India. The analysis of the comments and the religious representations in them thus also includes a comparative aspect, taking note of his changed social position.</p> <p>The analysis of the research material shows that while some of the commenters are passionate haters of Modi, the majority of his Facebook followers are big supporters of him and are charismatically oriented in their following. On his fan page, Modi is treated as a god, as a messenger of god and compared to religious figures such as Buddha and Swami Vivekananda. A savior belief in Modi is also strongly present in the comments. Some comments also show deep emotional commitment to Modi. As a new finding the study also shows that online charismatic following includes belief in reaching the leader personally through the comments despite there being hundreds of thousands of messages: some of the comments contain very personal requests and messages to Modi. As a conclusion, this study clearly supports earlier findings on charismatically oriented following drawing from natural cognitions related to religion, and shows that even in the following of a non-religious leader religious representations are clearly present. The study also reveals that social media provides a fruitful platform for the study of non-reflective beliefs.</p> <p>The main references for this study are: Kimmo Ketola's <i>The Founder of the Hare Krishnas as Seen by Devotees. A Cognitive Study of Religious Charisma</i> (2008), Ann Ruth Willner's <i>The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership</i> (1984), Justin Barrett's <i>Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds</i> (2011), Lee A. Kirkpatrick's <i>Attachment, evolution and the psychology of religion</i> (2005), Kingshuk Nag's <i>The NaMo story: A Political Life</i> (2014), Edward Luce's <i>In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India</i> (2011) and Robert V. Kozinets's <i>Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online</i> (2010).</p>			
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1. INTRODUCTION

Look at an army / and you're looking at / a dull gaggle of geese / look at a leader /
and you're looking into / the leader's claw and horn.¹

In this song called *Ollaan ihmisiksi* ('*Let's be human / Let's behave civilly*')² the late Finnish singer and songwriter Juice Leskinen plays around with the idea that behaviour and habits typically attributed to the animal kingdom are well-represented in humans. The song is built on animal metaphors to discuss peculiarities and flaws in human nature, and brings up the idea of *instincts*, animal-like innate mechanisms that affect our actions and thinking. Research tells us, that a case in point of mechanisms like these would, for example, be our innate tendency to favour our in-group – our herd or troop - and discriminate those outside our group (Brown 2010, 45–50). Another fascinating example would be the pan-human preference for cheesecake, it being a perfect combination of fats and sugars, two nutrients most vital to human survival³ (Pinker 1997, 534). Instincts like these are, according to researchers of evolutionary psychology, caused by mental structures that evolved in a process of evolutionary adaptation and have remained unchanged approximately for the last 100,000 years. These instincts can also be called non-reflective beliefs: beliefs that require little to no reflection enabling rapid decision-making. (Kirkpatrick 2005, 173).

In this particular quote from his song, Leskinen notes how well human hierarchies, army being the prototype of a hierarchical system, and human leaders compare with their animal kingdom counterparts. Non-reflective beliefs, social hierarchies and leader perceptions provide the conceptual background for this study that focuses on the religious representations in the following of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his Facebook fan page.

¹ In the song '*Ollaan ihmisiksi*' by Juice Leskinen (1981). My translation.

² The title of the song is a Finnish idiom. My translation.

³ Pinker notes how cheesecake consists of two ingredients that were crucial to human survival; fats (as in big game animals) and sugars (as in berries), and is therefore '*designed to maximally titillate evolved taste-preference mechanism*'. (Pinker 1997, 534)

1.1. Framing of the research questions

The aim of this study is to increase our understanding on the non-reflective beliefs behind what is traditionally called charismatic orientation towards a leader by conducting a case study on the Facebook fan page of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the comments on it. The focus of this study is on the supernatural, or magico-cultic, as Weber also puts it (Weber 1958[1916], 50), qualities and expectations attributed to Modi in the follower responses. In other words, representations which could be defined as religious are examined. When this study was started in the fall of 2012 and the first two sets of data were collected, Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat and a popular prime minister candidate of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), also known as the Indian People's Party (Chakraborty 2012). Today, since 26 March 2014, Modi is the acting Prime Minister of India after BJP's somewhat surprise landslide victory in 2014 (The Economist 2014a). Modi was and is one of the most controversial politicians in India (Jyoti 2012, 28–31). Him and his background will be more thoroughly discussed in chapter 4.

This study is theoretically informed in the sense that the background for the analysis is in previous theoretical formulations of charisma and non-reflective beliefs related to religion. It has been previously suggested that the cognitive mechanisms behind charismatic follower orientation could be a factor in the acquisition and transmission of religious ideas, but to as far is known, no case study of a secular figure from this point of view has been made. A religious figure, the leader of the Hare Krishna movement, was studied from this point of view by a Finnish scholar of religion Kimmo Ketola. (Ketola 2002; Ketola 2008.)

The research material for this study comes from Narendra Modi's official Facebook fan page⁴. In the beginning of this study in the fall of 2012, Modi's

⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/narendramodi.official> . Instead of *Modi's official Facebook fan page* the page is later referred to as just *Modi's Facebook fan page*.

Facebook fan page was ‘liked’⁵ by roughly a million followers. Today, at the time of writing this (December 2014), the amount of people liking his page is nearly 30 million. The page and all the comments on it are publicly available for everyone to see. Commenting on Modi’s fan page, however, requires registration on Facebook. The comment data for this study was collected on four separate dates: two sets in 2012 and two in 2014 after Modi’s election as the Prime Minister of India. The comments were then saved into plain text files. Even though a website, such as Modi’s Facebook fan page, is public, the researcher must take into consideration the ethics of using material found on the website. Ethics concerning research done on the Internet is a complex and ever-evolving field which will be discussed in chapter 2.3.

Narendra Modi was chosen as the secular leader to be studied because of his massive Facebook following. Modi being from one of the most populous countries in the world and utilizing social media actively in his affairs and campaigning (see chapter 4) contributed to the decision as well. India provides an interesting background for the study as it can be said that it is a country where secular and religious are intertwined in many aspects of personal and societal life (see chapter 1.4.). Finnish politicians were also considered as subjects of this study, but no particular politician with as rich a following as Modi’s was found. With other Indian politicians considered, none had a social media profile as active as Modi’s.

In addition to being the first study of these premises on a secular figure, this study offers a new way of looking into follower responses because of the material and the method used. By conducting a *netnographic* study it is possible to observe a large crowd of followers and their responses unobtrusively and covertly, which is a significant advantage in the study of non-reflective beliefs. Netnography is a method originally developed for marketing studies. Robert Kozinets who has coined the term and is the author of *Netnography: Doing qualitative research*

⁵ ‘Liking’ is a Facebook specific way of interacting with a fan page, comment or status of a Facebook member or community, where one publicly announces his or her endorsement and subscribes to subsequent updates to a page, comment or status. People who like a fan page, are called followers in this study.

online has described netnography as ‘culturally-oriented study of that technologically-mediated social interaction that occurs through the Internet and related information and communications technologies’. Netnography’s methodology is still in flux. (Kozinets 2010, 3.) The guidelines chosen for this study will be described in chapter 2.2. As previously mentioned and as far as it is known, this study is the first netnographic study of follower responses, and the first study on a secular figure and his followers from the point of view of non-reflective beliefs related to religion. By studying a secular leader, the followers’ responses should be less affected by theological notions because there is no explicit religious dogma surrounding the person.

Interviewing Modi’s followers was also considered as a method for this study, but the idea was rejected because of several factors seen as not research-friendly. First of all, it was thought that interviewing people would make them more reflective, when compared to a covert surveillance in an online environment, about their opinions and feelings toward Modi, and would thus hinder or prevent the surfacing of non-reflective beliefs. Secondly, language, or more specifically the lack of English language skills on the participants’ side and the Indian languages’ skills on the interviewer’s side, was seen as an impediment for gathering rich interview material. Third, a larger amount of data was preferred, for more diverse types of followers and following to appear. For these reasons data collection from social media was chosen as the method for this study.

The research questions of this study can be articulated as follows:

Primary research question:

In what ways is Narendra Modi revered in a religious way on his Facebook fan page?

Secondary research question:

Has the reverence of Modi accumulated more extraordinary or religious

representations after he became the Prime Minister of India, in comparison to being the Chief Minister of Gujarat?

In the beginning of this research process the ‘*theory of mind* violations’ – such as belief in Modi's ability to know exactly what others are thinking - were chosen as the main focus of this study. After a brief review of the gathered data, however, it was decided that the material was not saturated enough with just that particular aspect and rich on so many other aspects, that the perspective of the study was broadened to all religious representations in his following.

In this study the formation of Modi's charismatic following or the reasons behind its formation will not be assessed. It could provide an interesting look on the makings of charisma, but because of it being such a broad question of multiple angles that should be taken into consideration, it has been left outside the scope of this investigation. It is also presumed, that studying the reasons behind Modi's apparent charismatic following would also not contribute remarkably to the specific study of religious representations found in his following.

1.2. Previous studies

Religious leader figures like priests, shamans and gurus have throughout history been attributed with special traits or abilities like the power to heal by sheer will or the ability to see the future. One example of this is the infallibility principle attached to the pope, the doctrine of *papal infallibility* (see e.g. Catechism of the Catholic Church). It has been noted, however, by scholars, including the famous political scientist Max Weber, that this attribution of special

powers not only concerns religious figures but secular leaders as well. Weber coined the term *charisma* to be used with this type of following. A later scholar of political science Ann Ruth Willner expanded Weber's theorizations about charisma and analysed the formation of charisma, also categorizing different types of charismatic following. In these theorizations the cultural context of the leader is seen as having great significance to the specifics of the charismatic following. (Willner 1984, 6–8; Weber 1964[1925], 358–359.)

The field of study that is concerned with religion from the point of view of cross-culturally recurrent mental mechanisms, cognitive science of religion (CSR), has also been interested with the topic of charisma, but mostly from the point of view of using charisma to promote religious ideas. According to a CSR scholar Pascal Boyer, super human perceptions, as in such perceptions that violate intuitive beliefs about e.g. people's abilities and physical restrictions, are caused by *essentialist reasoning*, an innate bias to treat different social positions (e. g. shaman or a priest, as in Boyer's argumentation) as based on unique personal attributes. (Boyer 1994, 156–184.) A Finnish scholar of religion Kimmo Ketola has joined the research on charisma with his study of the founder of the Hare Krishnas and his followers. Ketola formulated one hypothesis of his study as follows:

In light of the previous analysis of the message component, my hypothesis here is also that charisma depends crucially on pan-human cognitive mechanisms and processes of human interaction, and not on the specific cultural mind-set. (Ketola 2002, 36)

This study follows Ketola's hypothesis about charisma as more of a product of the pan-human mind and universal non-reflective beliefs than a culture-specific context. In other words, the focus of the study is not just on comments and representations that reflect Indian religions or religious beliefs, but more extensively on all comments that exhibit views of Modi as more than human.

The use of social media in this study reflects the growing popularity of the platform as well the growing academic interest in it. Social media has also been used as a research platform in many recent religion related studies. One of the

most recent examples is Hoyle's, Bradford's and Frenett's (2015) study *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS* where the social media postings of Western female Muslim migrants to ISIS-controlled areas in Iraq and Syria are analyzed to understand the reasons why the women have migrated to these conflict-ridden areas, how their lives have become and what potential risks they pose in the future. (Hoyle, Bradford & Frenett 2015)

1.3. Personal pre-conceptions

In qualitative research the researcher's subjectivity must be taken into account since the interpretations made from the research material are inevitably affected by the researcher and his pre-conceptions (Flick 2006, 16). In this chapter I will try to clarify my previous fascinations to this research topic and my motives for choosing this field of study.

Part of the reason why I became interested in the area of universal non-reflective beliefs about leaders I owe to our late family member, a Bernese mountain dog called Bruno. He often seemed ashamed as though waiting to be reprimanded right before one of his transgressions, such as spreading the garbage, was noticed by us. Based on naïve logic and jumped conclusions, I must admit, I started wondering whether he thought we knew what he had done before we had even entered the 'scene of the crime' so to speak. This brings up the idea of 'theory of mind', a very human ability to contemplate on what others are thinking, to account for their perspectives. Whether or not dogs possess this quality or not is under dispute, but I wondered if there was a difference between *theory of mind* applicability and the object's social position – does a dog (or a human) think the 'alfa', the leader, of his group knows everything he knows? I noticed that this had

been studied among people, too, to some extent. Knight (2008), for example, studied four to eight-year-old Yukatek Mayan speakers and found a continuum of perceived omniscience between natural and non-natural entities⁶. In the study the Catholic God performed best and was thus perceived as knowing the most. (Knight 2008)

What comes to the ‘continent’ of India, as part of my subjectivity I feel compelled to admit my fascination for the country, its culture(s) and its people. I’ve visited the country now three times, having spent there over 8 months in total now, and am also currently on Indian soil writing this thesis while conducting an internship in Jaipur in the state of Rajasthan. Earlier, in 2012, I studied Indian society, culture, philosophy, religion, arts and environmental and social issues in the University of Hyderabad as part of a *Contemporary India* course, which was organized in collaboration with the *Nordic Centre in India*. During this course I also wrote a paper on the RSS, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, an ultranational Hindu organisation which forms the ideological backbone behind Narendra Modi’s party, the BJP. I am also proficient in writing, reading and speaking simple Hindi phrases. In other words, India is very familiar to me, which can be seen as either a hindrance to my objectivity or as an asset to understanding different phenomena related to India through insider’s knowledge.

Regarding the hierarchical aspects of Indian culture(s) and all phenomena related to it, I’ve been fortunate to hear and witness some interesting occurrences, which I dare to present as anecdotes. Closest to the topic of this study was the account of a recently widowed woman who said that she had trouble sleeping because she was afraid that her late husband might be haunting their house during the night. Considering the patriarchal structure of many Indian households, the husband often having a different (higher) social position from the wife, a belief of this sort could indicate special characteristics attributed to the the head of the family, the husband. Other incidents include witnessing the traditional Indian greeting of touching a respected person’s feet and waiting for him/her to touch the

⁶ Knight defines natural entities as humans and non-human animals, and non-natural entities as Catholic God and local religious figures. (Knight 2008)

greeter's head as a sign of blessing from him/her. This tradition can be easily compared to such religious practices as the behavior witnessed during a Lutheran communion between a priest and a devout taking communion, for example. This tradition can also be seen as a reflection of the *darśan* tradition outlined in chapter 1.4.

Although this study focuses on particular mental mechanisms that can be seen as having affected the spread and success of religious ideas, ontological reductionism is steered clear of. As a scholar of religion Justin Barrett puts it: '*Identifying the cognitive pedigree of a reflective belief does not automatically "explain away" the belief or make it wrong or unjustified*'. (Barrett 2011, 56.) To clarify, this study is not concerned with ontological claims such as the existence of a god or gods. Also, despite all the subjectiveness brought forward in this chapter, the aim of the researcher of this study is to remain as objective as possible.

1.4. The Indian context

A proper introduction to this study cannot be conducted without giving the reader a brief overture of India. Neil DeVotta, the editor of *Understanding Contemporary India* describes India through paradoxes:

It is both a young state and one of the world's oldest civilizations; it is a potential superpower, yet more than 300 million of its citizens live in abject poverty; it is the proud land of the peaceful Mohandas Gandhi, yet it brandishes nuclear weapons and hosts one of the world's largest militaries; its rivers are revered for embodying deities, yet are among the world's most polluted waterways; its infrastructure in many areas is abysmal, yet its information technology workers, engineers, scientists, and academics are in demand the world over; it is a country led by powerful women at various ranks, yet its women are among the most marginalized in the world; and it is a mind-boggling polytechnic society prone to secessionist movements and periodic communal violence, yet is also the world's largest and most vibrant democracy. (DeVotta 2010, 1.)

What comes to cultural and religious diversity there is no parallel. Four indigenous religions in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, a large Muslim community, Parsis (descendants of Persian Zoroastrians), Christians, Jews and many others comprise a religious buffet not easily matched. Language-wise India is also unique. There are 22 official languages, but an estimate sum of 6,000 languages and local dialects are actually spoken. Suffice it to say that it is very difficult to speak of Indian culture or Indians as a monolith. For this reason, the term Indian *culture(s)*, is in active use in this study. (See e.g. DeVotta 2010, Luce 2011, 154.)

To understand the hierarchical undertone of Indian society, one needs to understand its caste⁷-class-tribe-gender stratified structure, and the discrimination it entails. The caste system is a classic example of hierarchy in the Indian society and although discrimination based on caste is forbidden by laws such as *the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act* from 1955, it is still widely common especially towards the *dalit*, formerly known as the Untouchable. The caste division was previously understood as a means of segregating the people who did labor categorized as *polluted* from the ones who did *pure* work. This division by profession, outlined in a Hindu law book *Manusmriti*, later evolved into division by descent, creating a system of hereditary pollution, poverty and discrimination. Discussing caste, two intertwining concepts also need to be covered: *varna* and *jati*. Varna refers to the classic quadruple division into *Brahmans* (priests and advisers), *Kshatriyas* (kings and warriors), *Vaishya* (merchants and landowners) and *Shudra* (servants, laborer, artisans). Although the varna is still present in the Indian society, jati is a more relevant system of reference. Jati divides people into regional endogamous groups who share the same language and culture. When talking about caste in general, the two concepts are seen as overlapping and as complementing each other. (Jaoul 2008; Lynch 2000; Zelliot 2000; Zelliot 2010.)

Class is also a remarkably dividing factor in the Indian society. During the last

⁷ The word 'caste', although originally Portuguese for 'pure', comes from the British who used it to describe the rigid nature of the Indian hierarchical system. (Zelliot 2008.)

two decades the impact of global economic power players and national neo-liberal economic policies have further increased the division into the *haves* and the *have-nots*. Tribes, on the other hand, are a peculiar and ever prevalent feature of India: the so-called *India of villages* continues to survive despite continuous urbanization and annexation of tribal land by the government and large multinational corporations. Gender-based discrimination also continues to persist all around India. One of the most glaring examples of this is the differences in enrollment and school completion between the sexes. Nine out of ten girls enrolled in school do not complete schooling, and one out of a hundred girls reach class XII in the rural areas. Issues such as female feticide and the dowry system also speak of gender inequality. (Jeffery 2014; Luce 2011, 10–13 & 38–42; NFG on Gender Issues in Education 2006.)

In the study of charisma in an Indian context the researcher must take into account the intertwined nature of the secular and the religious sphere in India, especially a specific contextual factor called the *darśan* or *darshan* tradition, and how it can be seen affecting the follower response. Darśan traditionally means seeing of the sacred, which usually refers to the perception of an image of a deity or a holy place such as the river Ganges, for example. It does however also relate to seeing revered and remarkable people. And seeing is here not understood simply as ‘to see’ but also as ‘to be seen’ and as ‘to touch’. To summarize and simplify the abstract and complicated concept, darśan is an old cultural custom to seek blessings from remarkable individuals, and it can be seen as something that combines religious practice and the reverence of respected individuals under the same concept. (Willner 1984, 32; Eck 1998, 3–6.)

In relation to the study of charisma, understanding darśan means understanding that not all leader-directed words and gestures that resemble charismatic follower orientation are of charismatic origin, but can actually be displays of the darśan tradition. (Willner 1984, 32; Eck 1998, 3–6.) While acknowledging the role of darśan in the study of charisma in an Indian context one should not, however, exaggerate its meaning. According to Ketola it can be argued that the persistence and popularity of Indian cultural particularities concerning status and hierarchy could specifically suggest their origin in pan-human mental dispositions, therefore

making the ideas not exclusively Indian, and not exclusively cultural. (Ketola 2008, 199.)

By underlining the extraordinary nature of India Edward W. Said's formulations of *Orientalism* should also be kept in mind. Said defined the term Orientalism to describe the patronizing Western attitude of creating the East, or the Orient, as the peculiar *other* that deviates from the norm, and is thus devoid of the same protection from exploitation as the West enjoys. Said emphasized the role of Western history of colonialism and its ideological penetration of the thinking of scholars with interests in the Orient. In this study the stereotypical view of the East is acknowledged, and all attempts are made to avoid depicting the research material and related phenomena as derivatives of this stereotype. Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, acknowledging one's subjectivity does not magically lead to complete objectivity. (Said 1991, 2–4 & 55–60.)

2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANDPOINT AND METHODS

In an epistemological sense, this study situates itself in the essentialist end of the social constructionism–essentialism scale, sometimes also called the social constructionism–social cognition scale⁸. Social constructionist paradigm assumes that reality is built and maintained in language and that nothing can be said of the reality outside of what is being said, at least not through the study of spoken word. Also, according to social constructionism, which is sometimes called anti-essentialism, culture is constructed in language with no permanent or authentic

⁸ Alasuutari (2001) calls this the 'sample view' – 'fact view' divide. (Alasuutari 2001, 114–115.)

background in the individual's biology, for example. The essentialist paradigm, however, states that language acts as an indicator of a reality outside of itself. According to essentialism, culture is an expression of the reality outside of it. In cognitive studies this essentialist stand usually means seeing culture and cultural phenomena as expressions of cognitive tendencies which are universal and biological in nature. (See e.g. Alasuutari, Pertti 2001, 114–115; Berger & Luckmann 1991[1966], 13; DeLamater & Hyde 1998.)

In this particular study the essentialist paradigm determines the approach taken towards the research data, the Facebook fan page comments, and the focus of the study. The cultural context behind the comments will not be analysed more thoroughly than what is necessary to achieve an understanding of the function or objective of the comments in order to answer the research questions at hand. In other words, the cultural setting of the comments is acknowledged but it is not the focal point of this analysis. The goal of this study then, is to provide insight which is not culture-specific.

2.1. Theoretically informed approach

This study is based on the previously mentioned theoretical backgrounds, but it is not driven by them. Furthermore, the previous theories are considered as starting points, not as formulations that restrict the analysis. This coincides with what Flick (2006) suggests in saying that all qualitative research should treat theories as mere versions of the world that are preliminary and undergo continuous revision through research. (Flick 2006, 100–102.)

2.2. Netnography

There is no existing parallel social construct, and in many ways, the Internet creates

wholly new social constructs. (Costigan 1999, xix.)

The method used in this study is, as previously mentioned, based on the principles outlined by Kozinets (2010) for a method called netnography. Acknowledging the transition of social worlds into digital form, Kozinets developed methodology for the research and understanding of people in online communities. He describes the method as a tool to *‘to help us understand the world of those who participate in online communities as a regular, ongoing part of their social experience’* (Kozinets 2010, 2).

The method was originally developed for marketing and consumer research, but has since been used in various fields of research. As the basic methodological stages and procedures of netnography Kozinets himself recommends the following five: 1) Entrée, 2) Data Collection, 3) Analysis and interpretation, 4) Research ethics and 5) Member checks. With the fifth stage Kozinets raises the question of informing the participants of the results of the study. However, the methodology of netnography has been used in various different ways, and Kozinets himself states that especially the question of informed consent and the abstract guidelines to it are *‘open to wide degrees of interpretation’*. This can also be said of the method itself. In its simplest form, netnography translates as a method for collecting data from an online community. Even the methods of data analysis in netnography are open to variation. In this study, like often in netnographic studies, the data is analysed using content analysis. (Kozinets 2010, 1–6; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets 2006.)

One special aspect to account for in a study of online environments is the special nature of the research material. When conducting a study on newspaper or other physical archive material, for example, the material can be with certain reservations determined as permanent, always existing material. Apart from the natural effects of aging and time-induced damage, the material never vanishes. In an online environment, however, the data under review exists on websites and servers that are usually commercially maintained and administrated. Unless the data holds specific value to the maintainers of the servers or the websites, there is no purpose to archive it. Due to limitations of digital archive space, a large

amount of data not deemed valuable is erased. Mitra and Cohen note that for these reasons the researcher must make it clear in the analysis that the data he or she has gathered from the cyberspace is always impermanent, and that the analysis '*is a snapshot of cyberspace*'. (Mitra & Cohen 1999, 197–198)

While underlining the specific nature of digital data, one should, however, take into account the nature other kinds of research material, too. From the point of view of research recorded interviews, for example, can be said to suffer from the same impermanent nature: once the words are spoken, they can only be recalled from the tape recorder which in itself can be regarded as a medium prone to recording errors or accidental deletion, for example. In this study, the impermanent nature of the collected comments is specifically acknowledged in the procedure of the actual collection: the comments are not presented as snapshots from Modi's Facebook fan page, but as parts of the collections 'recorded' – in a similar manner to a recorded interview – from Modi's Facebook fan page. The research material is thus the collected sets of data from the fan page, not the fan page in itself. In this way, it is ensured, that the material under review, is permanently, with certain reservations, stored in the data collections in exactly the same way as an interview, for example, would be.

2.3. Which metaphor to choose? Ethics and Internet research

There are few, if any, ethical procedures for in-person fieldwork that translate easily to the online medium. (Kozinets 2010, 5)

When posting public content online, it is very hard to know beforehand what the audience for that content will be. A public update made in Facebook, for example, can gather the interest of three family members, a community of one hundred

people outraged by the content of the message, or 100,000 people to whom the update is being reposted and shared in minutes for its funny and insightful wording. Today, one doesn't even have to post the message online oneself to have it shared online: making a public speech can circle the online masses of millions in the form of a digital video recording. In this way, the study of the digital world of today includes the consideration of different kinds of ethical questions than studies before the era of the Internet. Kozinets, who coined the term netnography, specifically acknowledges the difficulty in outlining the ethical procedures of the method. (Kozinets 2010, 6.)

In this study the adaptations to netnography made by Roy Langer and Suzanne C. Beckman (2005) will be used. These revisions differ from Kozinets' guidelines especially in their approach to informing the participants. According to Langer and Beckman online material can be compared to readers' letters in newspapers, which means that the postings have been intentionally made public, so asking for permission to use the material would be unusual and redundant. Also, Langer and Beckman note that asking for permission would weaken the one major strength of netnography, the ability to observe unobtrusively. (Langer & Beckman 2005, 197.)

In this study the unobtrusiveness is seen as one of the major strengths of method considering the focus of this study. As more thoroughly discussed in chapter 3.3. the study of instinct-like non-reflective beliefs requires the researcher to not activate reflection of a specific matter, but to observe the beliefs and their manifestations covertly as they happen. Also, because of the collection of so many comments, asking for permission for their use in this study, would have been extremely resource-heavy.

Even though the Facebook comments under analysis in this study were posted as public messages, an attempt is made to cover the identities of the posters. Since Facebook users most often use their real names, however, and unlike in the readers' letters in newspapers, for example, the use of nick names or pseudonyms is highly discouraged by Facebook, the names of the authors of the comments are hidden in this study. It would not be impossible, however, to discover the identity

of the poster of certain comment by doing an online search with the content of the message cited in this study, however. In this way, the omission of the commenters' names is more of a privacy respecting maneuver than an ethical procedure.

These principles and procedures outlined here should also follow the three major principle areas to be considered in human sciences outlined by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. They list the major areas of consideration as: *right of self-determination*, *prevention of harm* and *privacy and data protection*. The right of self-determination in this study comes from the nature of the research material being publicly available information. Avoiding harm to the participants of this study is taken into consideration by treating the participants and the collected data with respect as outlined in the paragraph above. Privacy and data protection is acknowledged by storing the data collections that have the names of the participants in a safe and secure manner and by omitting comments and quotes of comments that could somehow directly identify the commenters. However, since the data used for this study is public, the third principle would not need to be applied in this study. (Tutkimuseettinen neuvottelukunta 2009, 24–31.)

3. CHARISMA & NON-REFLECTIVE BELIEFS

3.1. Charismatic follower orientation

The charismatic leader is in a sense the Prometheus of politics who also steals from the gods by stretching political reality beyond the bounds of belief and prediction. (Willner 1984, 201.)

The first part of the theoretical background for this study consists of the concept of *charisma*. Sociologist Max Weber coined the now classical term of charisma to be used with people who are revered as more than just ordinary people. More specifically, he defines charisma in terms of two different perspectives. First, as a special attribute of magico-religious specialists and experts, the likes of magicians, prophets and priests. Second, he defines charisma in relation to three types of legitimate authority, a leader-follower relationship where the followers are to a certain extent expected to follow commands from the leader. The three types he lists as *legal authority*, *traditional authority* and *charismatic authority*. The first two pure types rely on rationality regarding legality (legal authority), and belief in traditions (traditional authority). (Weber 1964[1925], 323–329.) The third type, charismatic authority, relies on the exemplary character and features of the individual leader:

The term ‘charisma’ will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. (Weber 1964[1925], 358–359)

Ann Ruth Willner (1984) expands Weber’s theorizations about charisma in her book *The Spellbinders*. She studied the follower response of seven famous leaders: Castro, Gandhi, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Sukarno and Khomeini, and formulated different characteristics that can be said to define charismatic follower orientation. Willner makes some reservations concerning cultural relativism, however. First of all, cultural differences make it challenging to list universally

applicable characteristics regarding a charismatic following and its attributes (Willner 1984, 21). Secondly, she notes how the follower response differs in industrialized countries and countries where ‘*magic and supernatural are still overtly believed in*’. In countries like the United States, Willner declares, charismatic follower response often manifests itself in vague expressions of the leader’s exceptional nature and his extraordinary abilities such as ‘*emanation of power*’, or the expressions are framed with a clause such as ‘*it seems as if he...*’. In the less industrialized countries, a category in which India can also be placed in, the descriptions of the leader can be more expressive and less vague according to Willner. (Willner 1984, 22–23.)

Willner lists four different dimensions that characterize charismatic follower orientation: the *leader-image dimension*, the *idea-acceptance dimension*, the *compliance dimension* and the *emotional dimension*. In regards to charismatic follower orientation, the leader-image dimension is about treating the leader as exceptional. The idea-acceptance dimension in a charismatically oriented following, on the other hand, consists of blindly believing the leader’s statements as the absolute truth. The compliance dimension in this case means obeying the leader’s requests and commands without hesitation or questioning. The fourth dimension is about the followers’ special emotional commitment to the leader. As an example of this emotional commitment Willner outlines ‘*dire attempts to reach or touch the leader, worship gestures [and] treating the leader’s objects as holy*’. (Willner 1984, 19–23.)

Willner also divides the leader-image dimension into two subcategories specifically relevant to this study: as either *person-related* or *power/ability-related*. In person-related beliefs the leader is revered as a god or divinity, as a savior, or he/she is identified with a significant founder of religion or a holy character in one’s cultural context. When the powers or abilities of the leader are revered in a charismatic way, he/she is often thought as being superhuman, supernatural or exceptional by his abilities. Some common ability-related attributes Willner lists are treating the leader as prescient, regarding him/her as able to read other people’s minds, and being ‘*magically protected*’ or invulnerable. (Willner 1984, 19–23.)

3.2. Religious by nature

The second part of the theoretical background for this study comes from the study of reflective and non-reflective beliefs in relation to religion. The basis of studies in this field is in the conception of the human mind as like the Swiss army knife: contrary to the classic Piagetian Standard Social Sciences Model, our brains (minds) are domain-specific, not domain-general. The mind is not a general problem-solving machine that can be described as *tabula rasa* at birth, and processing all information in the same general domain. Our brains have different mechanisms, different areas of thought, for facing different kinds of problems the human species has faced along its evolution. Examples of these problems being finding a mate or finding food. The domain-specific areas of our mind form a basis for our thinking and consequent actions. (Kirkpatrick 2005, 162–165.) Barrett calls this basis natural cognition (Barrett 2011, 28–30).

Barrett, Sperber and Kahneman argue that this basis of our thoughts and actions relies on beliefs (“I believe I have to touch that ball to move it”), which are either reflective beliefs (beliefs that require active reasoning) or non-reflective beliefs that are innate, part of the natural cognition. An example of a non-reflective belief would be the idea that snakes are dangerous: it’s a cross-culturally recurrent fear. The purpose of these non-reflective beliefs, from the point of view of evolution, has been to aid our ancestors in fast decision making, such as “Snake – Danger – Run”, for example. These non-reflective beliefs also include beliefs about humans and their abilities and limitations. (Barrett 2011, 46–49.)

According to Barrett, our decision-making process is based on *an accessibility heuristic*. The purpose of this heuristic is to produce decisions fast and with as little cognitive effort as possible, which is why some researchers have begun using the term “cognitive misers” to describe human beings as decision-makers. Fast decisions have enabled our distant ancestors to survive as the previous snake example illustrates. To make decisions fast, our brains use non-reflective beliefs as defaults for reflective beliefs or lend plausibility to them. The easy availability

of the non-reflective beliefs is the main reason why some ideas are well distributed and cross-culturally recurrent. Ideas that are poorly or not at all based on natural cognition/non-reflective beliefs, are not well distributed. (Barrett 2011, 31.)

Because of the global recurrence of religion even in areas that have not been in contact with other cultures, it is safe to assume that natural cognition also consists of an intuitive, non-reflective set of beliefs that can be called natural religion. The study of this '*cultural expression of natural tendencies*' still '*remains in its infancy*', however, and is one important reason for why this particular study is conducted, too. (Barrett 2011, 131–132)

Another important concept to be taken into consideration when discussing reflective and non-reflective beliefs is the concept of *Theological Correctness*. Theological Correctness describes the cognitive struggle between non-reflective, natural religious beliefs and beliefs that are reflectively formulated, such as traditional theological formulations, for example. Theological Correctness implies that the more beliefs and religious concepts are reflected on, the more they tend to align with traditional theological notions, rather than intuition based beliefs. (Barrett 1999.)

In this study, special attention is focused on the non-reflective beliefs in relation to leaders.

3.3. Facebook comments: intuitive or reflective reasoning?

The most important issue regarding the study of non-reflective beliefs is the question of how to reach them. From the theories outlined above it can be

summarized that non-reflective beliefs should surface in situations that a) either require little reflection or b) in situations of distress where there is no time for reflective thinking. So how does social media, and Facebook in this specific study, fit into these criteria? Does posting on Facebook constitute one of these scenarios?

Ketola defines material that transmits non-reflective beliefs well as '*naturally occurring, unsolicited data*' (Ketola 2002, 16). With this criteria the Facebook comments analysed in this study should fit the criteria: the comments have not been added to Modi's Facebook fan page for the purpose of serving this study, nor have the comments in any other way been requested to be posted. The comments have been posted naturally on the fan page by their authors' wishes without solicitation. Barrett on the other hand states that the more thoughts require reflective thinking, like in the case of writing a book, the less they transmit non-reflective beliefs (Barrett 1999). This considered, a study of social media comments which allow and, what is important, even encourage⁹ rapid comments and sharing of thoughts, should be fit to reach non-reflective beliefs. Thus, netnography should work well in reaching basic level concepts if the data analysed consists of comments that have not required too much reflection and editing before posting them.

One aspect to consider as well, is the role of Internet as an alternative medium to face-to-face expression of thoughts. Although Facebook employs the use of real names instead of nick names for its users, it is beneficial to also take into consideration what Langer and Beckman have noted of online posting: '*From behind their screen identities, respondents are more apt to talk freely about issues that could create inhibitions in a traditional face-to-face group*' (Langer & Beckman 2005, 195). It is not impossible to register into Facebook with a fake name and even when posting with one's actual name, the 'screen identity' can encourage discussion not made face-to-face. In this way the study of social media, under forementioned study interests, can be seen to provide several benefits for the discovery of the non-reflective beliefs.

⁹ Facebook, for instance, has the question 'What is on your mind?' visible on the first page you log into, as if to encourage making one's current thoughts and state of mind public.

4. NARENDRA DAMODARDAS MODI



Image 1: Narendra Modi on the cover of Outlook magazine after his party, the BJP, won the election that consequently made him the Prime Minister of India. In addition to being an acronym of his name, *Namo* is an Indian religious greeting. [Source: <http://www.outlookindia.com/lcp.aspx?siteid=1&issue=11275>]

Narendra Damodardas Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, an Indian state

known for its booming economy, when this study was started. In the Indian national election of May 2014, however, Modi became the face of India by his party's, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP), landslide victory. BJP won 52 per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of Parliament, and Modi was the Prime Minister of India. Previously very much unknown to the world outside India, apart from those aware of the horrific ethnic clash in Gujarat in 2002, Modi suddenly became a global name, especially in the financial circles as a highly expected new pro-business leader of the emerging Indian economy. In this chapter the person and background of the current Prime Minister of India will be discussed in order to give an overview of the figure, whose followers' perceptions are in the centre of this study. (The Economist 2014a; Jeffery 2014)

First, Modi's background as a member of the right-wing nationalist group RSS, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, will be introduced in chapter 4.1., after which the most controversial incident from his Chief Minister period, the Gujarat riots of 2002, will be discussed in chapter 4.2. Finally his most celebrated primeministerial mandate as 'Mr. Development', a pro-business neo-liberal politician with a great track record in increasing the economic welfare in Gujarat, is described in chapter 4.3. In chapter 4.4. Modi's Facebook fan page is introduced and the specifics regarding data collection from the page is discussed.

4.1. Background in Hindu nationalism

Modi's ideological roots are in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh¹⁰ (RSS) movement which he, like his father, joined at a very young age. The RSS is a

¹⁰ 'The Organisation of National Volunteers'.

1925 founded Hindu nationalist movement, whose member count is approximated somewhere between two and six million. Even at two million it would account as the second largest political movement in the world, only second to the Chinese Communist Party (Luce 2011, 144; Nag 2014, 5–6). The RSS is organised in ways that closely resemble Second World War European fascism. Their uniforms and organisation structure are similar to those of Mussolini's Fascists' and Nazi Hitler Youth's. Although the organisation is not openly fascist and claims tolerance toward other religions, it's generally thought of as a deeply nationalist force idealizing and practising Hindu supremacy while also harboring a specifically anti-Muslim agenda. Their ideology is often titled as *Hindutva* meaning the promotion of Hindu values and beliefs nationwide. The RSS is also the mother organisation behind Modi's political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and it is said that the BJP as well as Modi often take advantage of the Hindutva idea to reel in Hindu voters. (Nag 2014, 6–8 & 175–176; Luce 2011, 150–154.)

Although Modi himself is not under review in this study, his relationship with Hindu nationalism gives clue of the nature of his most ardent followers. As a supporter of Hindutva, Modi's following can be said to consist of many devote Hindus who support the RSS and its ideology. However, in spite of being an anti-Muslim Hindutva icon to many – and not least for the events described in the next chapter – Modi is also followed by Muslims interested in the pro-business side of his political ideology. Thus, despite his background, he cannot be described as only enjoying a Hindu following. (Nag 2014, 135–147.)

4.2. 'The butcher of Gujarat'

A key moment in Modi's political career were the so-called Gujarat riots of

2002. The incident began 27 February 2002 when the Ahmedabad-bound Sabarmati Express train's sleeper coach S6, carrying Hindu pilgrims (*kar sevaks*), was set on fire at a small station in the city of Godhra by a Muslim crowd as an escalation of an on-going tensed situation between the Hindu pilgrims and Muslim tea sellers and hawkers in the area. In this fire, 58 passengers, including women, children and elderly, were burned alive. As a reaction, beginning the next day, thousands of Hindu nationalists armed with swords, knives and firearms started a systematic and violent attack on the Muslim community in Gujarat, both in urban and rural areas. (Luce 2011, 159–163.)

In addition to killing and lynching Muslim men, many women and young girls were assaulted. Some women were raped and then burned alive in front of their families. The Gujarat police force was nowhere to be found during this incident, and even when they took action, reports say that 66 per cent of those killed in police firing were Muslims. A former Muslim MP of Ahmedabad, Ehsan Jafri, fearing for his life specifically asked for police protection during the incident calling several powerful people in the city. The police visited his establishment but left right after, even as a violent mob was stationed outside, providing no protection despite an obvious threat to his well-being. After the police left, Jafri was dragged from his house and beaten to death, his body stripped and body parts chopped off and then burned. Also, while the police took no action, for unknown reasons two ministers from the Modi ministry were stationed at the headquarters of the police communications centre during the riots, sparking rumors of the participation of Modi's ministry in the riots. (Nag 2014, 88–93; Jyoti 2012, 28–31; Kamat & Mathew 2003, 4–6.)

Modi's involvement in the riots as the Chief Minister of Gujarat are somewhat unclear and he has not been convicted of anything, but he is generally accused of flagrant inaction. According to some statements he even allegedly said that Hindus should be '*let to vent their anger*' and that '*every action has an equal and opposite reaction*' justifying the violence as reaction the train fire. Although Modi dismissed the riots at the time they were taking place merely as a "Hindu backlash" in response to the train fire, according to a report from the Human Rights Watch the riots were a result of months of planning by the militant Hindus.

The Human Rights Watch, in reference to the inaction of the police, titled their report of riots as '*We have no orders to save you*'. (The Economist 2012; Kamat & Mathew 2003, 4–6; Nag 2014, 99.)

It is also clear, that Modi was present in a meeting where it was decided that the bodies from the train fire should be brought to Ahmedabad in the morning of 28 February 2002, the day when the rioting started, although there were warnings by the police and civil servants that it could cause a serious public law-and-order situation. One BJP minister and a rival of Modi, Haren Pandya, who was later killed by an alleged Muslim terrorist attack, said that while he objected the moving of the bodies, other cabinet members promoted the idea saying that a reaction from the public would benefit the BJP in following elections. The horrible statistics state that duuring the Gujarat riots somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 people were killed, of whom the official records say 70 per cent were Muslims. (Nag 2014, 92–97; Luce 2011, 159–163.) In one interview, when Modi was asked by a Reuters reporter whether he regrets what took place in Gujarat, he compared the riots and his subsequent sentiments to running over a puppy:

[if] someone else is driving a car and we're sitting behind, even then if a puppy comes under the wheel, will it be painful or not? Of course it is. If I'm a chief minister or not, I'm a human being. If something bad happens anywhere, it is natural to be sad. (Gottipati & Banerji 2013.)

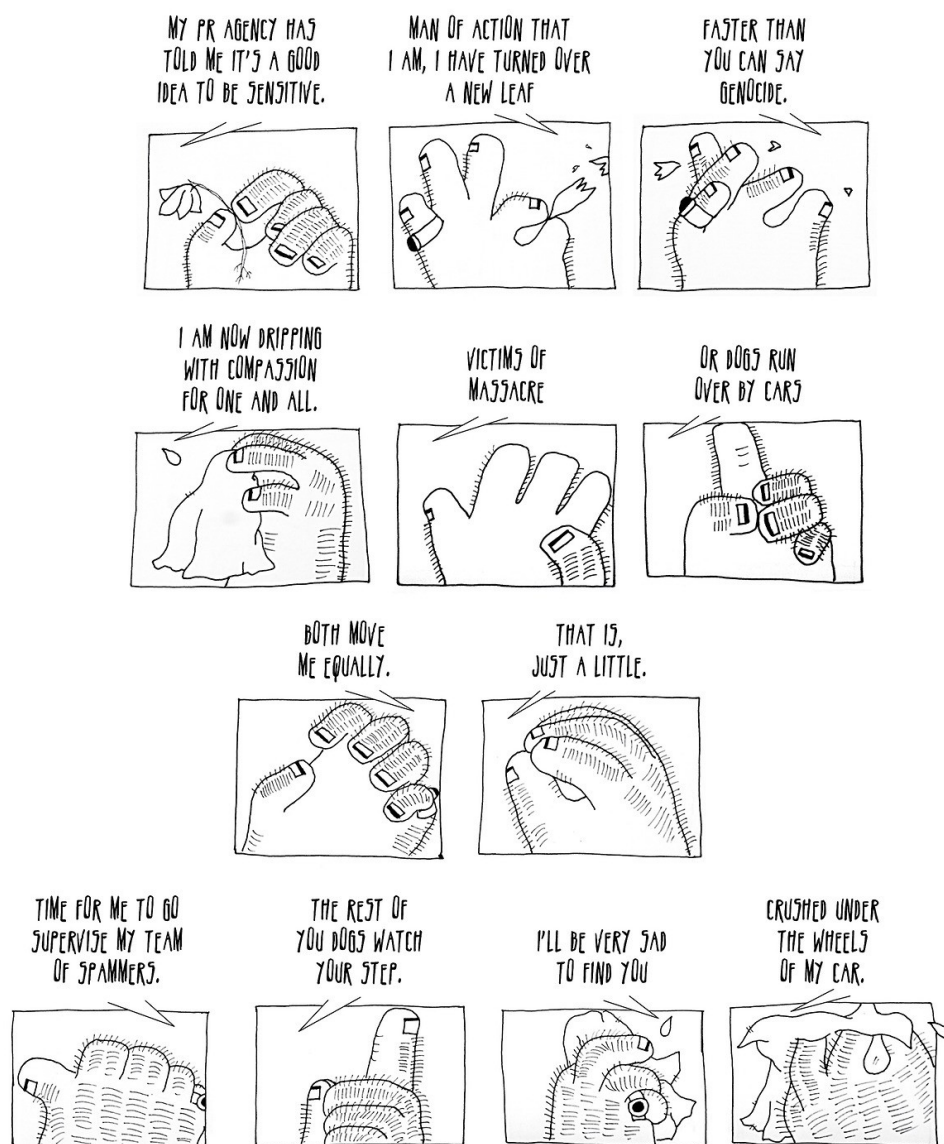


Image 2: An Indian cartoonist's take on Modi's 'puppy comments'. [Source: <http://crocodileinwatertigeronland.tumblr.com/post/55475198754>]

The Gujarat riots were widely condemned by the international audience, one exception being the United States. However, the Bush administration in 2005 did deny Modi's diplomatic visa and existing tourist/business visa to the US because of his role in the riots. (Nag 2014, 114.)

4.3. '*Vikas purush* – a development man'

Modi's most acclaimed mandate behind his popularity comes from his success in improving the economy of Gujarat during his tenure as the Chief Minister. His neo-liberal right-wing politics in Gujarat, aimed at attracting big companies, were a major success. His tactic of removing and streamlining bureaucracy, loosening environmental laws and investing in modern road and power infrastructure, all desired by the companies willing to invest in the state, was able to create a red carpet for many foreign and domestic companies, thus creating lots of new jobs and boosting Gujarat's economy to a more than 11 per cent annual economic growth rate, clearly outpacing the national standards. Big international companies such as General Motors Co. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd have willingly invested in big factories located in the state. (Nag 2014; Wall Street Journal 2011)

A lot of Modi's critics, however, underline the lack of improvement in the Human Development Index (HDI) of Gujarat, or general benefits to the ordinary Gujaratis in spite of the booming economy. Some opponents of Modi have also downplayed his success in this field by trying to remind the public of the monstrosities that took place in Gujarat. As a case in point, Modi's primary opponent in the 2014 elections, Rahul Gandhi from the Congress party, underlined Modi's communal past and described Gujarat's development by saying '*many evil leaders have done great development work*' comparing Modi to China's Mao Zedong. (Wall Street Journal 2011.)

As Modi is now the acting Prime Minister of India, he's continuing on his pro-business politics nationwide. This means utilizing the Gujarat model nationwide. As a consequence, many international and Indian economists are expecting him to cut-down on government spending by privatizing state agencies and companies, such as in the coal mining industry, and streamlining national bureaucracy to attract more foreign direct investment, in addition to improving the infrastructure desired by multinational companies willing to make their products in India. (Nag 2014, 20–22.)

4.4. Modi in Facebook: collecting data from his official fan page



Image 3: Modi's official Facebook fan page.



Image 4: A topic and comments on Modi's official Facebook fan page.

Modi is known to be tech-savvy: for using breakthrough technology to project a 3D hologram image of himself during his Prime Minister campaign to reach areas he didn't travel to, for continuously engaging in writing a blog¹¹, and for being the first Indian politician to chat live online with ordinary Indian people. His Facebook fan page is thus a naturally fitting aspect of his online persona constructed to reach the constantly expanding population of Indian 'netizens'. (Nag 2014, 160–162 & 188.)

To inform the reader unfamiliar with Facebook of what this flag ship of social media is about, a brief summary of its history and nature is needed. As a general observation it can be said that Facebook is one of the best known social media platforms today, in addition to Twitter and Instagram which is now also owned by Facebook. In many ways it can be said that Facebook has been the pioneer of the social media revolution since it was created February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, a psychology student at Harvard University. It was originally set up only for the use of university students, but was then extended to anyone with a registered email address in 2006. Facebook's official mission statement declares its purpose as '*to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected*'. Currently, Facebook has 890 million daily active users, and today over 80 per cent of its user base consists of people outside North America where it originated from. Facebook's business model is based on advertising revenue it gets by customized advertisements it places in the user's newsfeed. (Facebook newsroom 2015; Phillips 2007.)

India is one of the still rapidly growing user bases for Facebook. As the amount of smart phone users in India rises steadily, the number of Facebook users is constantly increasing with it. One interesting aspect to take note of, when it comes to using social media in India, however, is the fairly new and very stringent Indian information legislation, specifically the Section 66A of the Information Technology Act. This legislation grants the Indian police exceptionally broad powers to arrest someone based on social media postings. So far, people have

¹¹ As a personal finding after discussing Modi with several Indians, I discovered that a lot of people described Modi in a positive light in regard of how he informs the public of his current affairs. Writing a blog clearly reflects this aspect of his public personality.

been arrested and accused of criminal content on very minimal grounds. Some of the most publicized cases have been ‘liking’ a Facebook post that criticized a strike, and posting a message online complaining about the police not doing enough to find the poster’s stolen car. What comes to the effects of this law to the general user’s willingness or carefulness to post something online is unknown, however. (Anand 2014 & Vij 2012.)

Facebook consists of massive amounts of public data that is freely available, even if one is not registered in Facebook or logged into it. A lot of this data consists of demographical information such as information on preferences of certain age groups. This type of data can be described as extremely marketing-friendly data and could possibly be very easily used for commercial purposes, e.g. designing marketing strategies for specific audiences. Arguably for this reason or some other unspecified reason, Facebook, with its own business model in advertisement, has forbidden and obstructed the automatic collection of their data without their permission. Researchers have, however, used different software tools to automate data gathering from Facebook for scientific research. (Phillips 2011) For this study the most practical solution, with no suitable software for automatic collection of data found¹², was to gather the data manually.

First it was decided that the data would be collected in two parts, on two separate dates: the 6 November 2012 and the 20 November 2012. This method of collection was chosen to increase the diversity of the material. New comments are made on Modi's fan page constantly¹³ and new topics are added daily. By having two weeks in between the data collections, it was thought that the material should consist of a more diverse set of participants and comments. After Modi was elected as the Prime Minister in May 2014, it was decided that another two sets of data would be collected to compare his follower response before and after his election. These two sets were collected on 20 July 2014 and 6 August 2014.

Generally, when deciding, which amount of data is enough for the purpose of

¹² None of the found Facebook data mining software were functional.

¹³ A plethora of new comments were added even during the data mining tasks which lasted approximately 10 to 20 minutes.

the study, it is thought that the researcher should see whether the sample is '*rich in relevant information*' (Flick 2006, 131). For this study, the four sets of data collected provided a satisfying amount of relevant information.

The next phase, after the data collection was finished, was indexing the comments with a running number and a name referring to the particular collection. Since a total of 6,617 comments had been collected, doing the indexing manually was not considered efficient time-wise. Indexing the comments automatically with a computer program was deemed the best approach. Since no suitable software was found, a *python*¹⁴ program for this particular task was written. Because netnographic studies often have similar unindexed data as research material, this small program is considered possibly useful to future researchers as well. For this reason, the code of the program written is displayed in Appendix 2 for the free use of other researchers.

Considering the gathered research material in a critical light several factors need to be taken into consideration. First, the data used in this study consists of relatively short comments and do not necessarily give a crystal clear view of what the commenter is trying to say. Some comments only have a few words leaving the message of the comment somewhat unclear. Second, some comments are written in other languages than English which makes analysing them a nearly impossible task. Not only are these comments in Hindi, but also in other Indian languages based on their different alphabet. Obviously these comments had to be left outside the analysis. Limiting the scope of comments analysed to the English ones unfortunately omits material that might have had specific value to the study at hand.

A third aspect to consider in reviewing the integrity and value of the gathered research material is the demography of Modi's followers posting on his Facebook fan page. Who are the Indian 'netizens' following Modi? Are they mainly college students, retirees or middle-aged middle-class men? Unfortunately this is unknown. Considering the general demographics of Facebook users, it has been

¹⁴ *Python* is a coding language similar to e.g. *java script*.

said that 85 per cent of college students are on Facebook. This could indicate that a lot of the comments in this study as well were made by tech-savvy college students. However, studies also show that younger people in recent years have become less engaged with Facebook because of their parents' increasing presence there. (Phillips 2011) It could be argued then just like the field of social media in general, so are the demographics of social media continuously evolving. For these reasons, an easy answer to the demography of the followers on Modi's Facebook fan page is difficult to come by.

5. THE ANALYSIS: MODI IN HIS FOLLOWERS' EYES

In this chapter the collected data will be analysed in light of the previously outlined theoretical backgrounds by exploring the religious representations in the comments collected from Modi's Facebook fan page on four separate dates. In this analysis the mass of data will be treated as one chunk of material: in the conclusions comparisons between the years 2012 and 2014 are made. First, a general overview of the data and its nature will be given. After that, Modi's followers' perceptions of him will be portrayed in four categories into which the religious representations that were found during the analysis were grouped in during the analysis process.

Some of the comments analysed here use Indian terms and concepts that are only understandable to a person familiarized with the subcontinent. The basic meanings embedded in these comments would be impossible to understand without assessing the cultural setting that they were made in. Since the focus of this study is not on these cultural expressions, however, but on the non-reflective beliefs behind them, these terms and concepts are not too deeply discussed. Short

interpretations of these terms and concepts are, however, made in order to make sense of the content of the comments in question .

The process of analysing the data can be described to have consisted of four different stages. Initially all the comments were read through to achieve a general overall picture of the data. After that the comments were read with special attention paid to descriptions and concepts in the comments where Modi was represented as more than an ordinary person, thus violating the natural, non-reflective ideas about ordinary people. Going through the material from this perspective made it possible to create initial categories of different types of comments¹⁵. This formed the third stage of the analysis. In the fourth and last stage of the analysis these initial categories were compared with Ann Ruth Willner's (1984) different categories of charismatic follower orientation and then finally summarized into the form they are now represented in here.

5.1. A general overview of the comments

The comments on Modi's Facebook fan page are almost without exception very short in nature. Many of them are just one-liners, or consist of only two or three sentences. This can be said to reflect the general nature of social media comments: if one's comment is too long, it is more easily left unnoticed among the myriad of other comments – short comments are thus appreciated and encouraged. This is especially true with the possibly biggest rival of Facebook, the Twitter, where messages have to be fit into 160 characters.

¹⁵ Examples of these initial categories: *Modi as godlike*, *Modi as a religious figure*, *Modi as otherwise supernatural*.

Approximately half of the messages collected for this study are in other languages besides English, and thus mainly outside the scope of this study, as brought forward in chapter 4.4. Even some of the comments in English are sometimes so filled with grammatical and typing errors that their message has become impossible to comprehend, and for that reason these comments have thus been omitted from this study. Some of the comments can also easily be classified as *spam*, messages put out on Facebook solely for advertising or self-promoting purposes with no relevant content to Modi's fan page or other comments on the fan page.

The comments have been indexed as either '*MODI_A_#*', '*MODI_B_#*', '*MODI_C_#*' or '*MODI_D_#*', where '#' marks the number of the comment in the text files collected for this study. MODI_A refers to the data collected 6 November 2012, MODI_B to the data collected 20 November 2012, MODI_C to the data collected 20 July 2014 and MODI_D refers to the data collected 6 August 2014. These index names are displayed after the comments, unless many comments or parts of comments are analysed as a homogenic body of evidence – in which case the index names are shown in the foot marginal to avoid breaking the flow of the text.

Although the vast majority of the comments exhibit a positive outlook on Modi, some comments express straightforward hatred towards him. Among others, he is referred to as '*a true terrorist of india*'¹⁶, '*a killer of tribal community*'¹⁷, '*the killer of gujarath*'¹⁸, '*the killer of innocent people*'¹⁹ and as '*Indian HITLER*'²⁰. These comments in comparison to the positive comments made of Modi clearly show his polarizing nature in the field of Indian politics. Many comments can also be classified as 'neutral' in terms of showing no specific charismatic orientation toward Modi or hatred towards him. Negative comments and neutral comments are not paid close attention to in this analysis, since the focus of the study is on the religious representations in Modi's charismatic following. The following chapters

¹⁶ MODI_A_248.

¹⁷ MODI_A_249.

¹⁸ MODI_A_640.

¹⁹ MODI_A_1172.

²⁰ MODI_A_1197.

represent the categories into which his charismatic Facebook following can be grouped. These categories were formulated during the analysis and showcase four different types of reverence that can be classified as religious representations in Modi's Facebook following: *Modi as godlike*, *Modi as savior*, *Modi as a religious figure* and *Modi as a unique human*. The fourth category is a general category that combines different forms of reverence where Modi's abilities or person is described in ways that transcend ordinary human capabilities or characteristics. Quotes used in the next chapters are examples of the comments reflecting the given categories. Grammatical errors or typing errors in the comments are not corrected.

5.2. 'You are god to us!' - Modi as godlike

First category of religious representations in Modi's Facebook following describes him as a god. There is no ambivalence in the definition from a literal point of view. Comments of this type were not plenty, but their message is strong. Below are some examples of the comments where this deification is clearly present:

please listen evryone..as you all know narendara modi is god for us..
(MODI_A_116)

my god is modi ji. (MODI_B_388)

Sir,u r god to us! (MODI_D_432)

These comments show no hesitation or vagueness in their concrete deification. Modi is declared as one's personal god and as *our* god. The first comment even expresses a desire to evangelize for him: '*please listen evryone* [sic]' (MODI_A_116). So not only is there a motive to appraise him as god, there is also a motive to let others know of his divinity. This deification also coincides with the first aspect of Willner's leader-image dimension of a charismatic follower orientation (Willner 1984, 19–23).

One fact that has to be acknowledged in this analysis, is the rarity of comments of this particular nature. What could be the reasons why comments defining Modi with the straightforward 'god' title were so few? This could be an indication of *theological correctness* in action (Barrett 1999). In this particular case it would mean that the belief 'Modi is god' indicates a non-reflective belief backed by natural charismatic following related cognitions, and 'Modi is just a human' is a belief expressing deeper, resource-demanding reflection. While human gods exist in many religions, there is a clear tension between these two beliefs – tension that can be seen as the strongest of all these four categories of comments, at least judging by the amount of comments of this particular nature. Even in a non-reflective-commenting-friendly environment such as Facebook (see chapter 3.3.) it seems that the belief 'Modi is god', no matter how charisma-related intuition-induced, is not easily stated. And the reason for the difficulty to state it could be in the great amount of conflict between the two forementioned beliefs, as outlined by the concept of theological correctness.

5.3. *'Sirji, you are the only hope for the drowning India'* - Modi as savior

In this second category Modi is treated as the only man who can save India, reflecting savior beliefs found in many religions. Very few comments stating his savior-like nature actually conceptualize or bring forward what it is that India or the followers themselves need to be saved from, but India and the personal situation of these particular followers is clearly identified as 'in crisis' in their messages. The comments that do describe a crisis India is described as going through usually list the relevant critical issues as either the suffering of the poor and rural communities, or as the threatening political situation because of rapidly growing superpowers such as China. Comments grouped into this category were most common of all the four categories of comments listed here. The examples in this chapter show different styles of treating Modi as a savior:

Narendra Modi is the only hope who can take India at a deserving height...
(MODI_A_335)

modiji only u the person who can change the pathological rural life (MODI_D_1458)

plz vote for modi,in this india so many poor people suffering with lot of diseases but this cong govt spending money for kasab,y we have useless rules in india,plz change india.only u can change sir (MODI_A_337)

sir!! U r number 1 pm of INDIA!! u r the nly who can chnge india!!!
(MODI_C_151)

Respected PM Sir, as we all know china can never be trusted,we need Japan to counter china. Japan is the most trusted partner.china can not be destroyed but can be avoided , scared with our unity .They know that we Indians are divided our political parties like congress & sp & few others look for weakness in our own

Govts.U as PM of India is only HOPE for a United powerful India. (MODI_C_31)

keep yourself out from Gujrat modi jee and and take he challange to change the country into gujrat u r the need of hour only and only u can change the face of india (MODI_A_627)

u are the only Indian Hope. (MODI_A_648)

Sirji, you are the only hope for the drowning India (MODI_A_1673)

Many of these comments use the title '*only hope*' with Modi, clearly underlining his uniqueness in comparison with other leaders and politicians. Modi is seen as the only man capable of changing India: thus also commenting on his abilities as being particularly unique and savior-like.

Some comments list corruption as India's biggest problem, and thus describe Modi as the only man to get rid of it, and in some comments he is seen as the only person to keep Indians safe:

Corruption has made india handicapped please make it stand only u can do (MODI_A_1131)

'all are safe due to Sh. Modiji only' (MODI_A_2090)

The following comment indicates a very personal approach to Modi, and a desperate plea for one's life:

sir u r my dream..... cn u plz... help us 2 survive...???????? (MODI_B_292)

Although this comment is not written in perfect English, its message is loud and clear: it is basically a plea for one's life. Modi is treated as the ultimate savior, as a '*dream*'-like messiah coming to the rescue of people who are in dire need of

saving.

Some of the savior-oriented comments also indicate a following that can be described as militant in nature. These comments are also in accordance with what Willner describes as the compliance and idea-acceptance dimensions (Willner 1984, 8). Modi is pledged allegiance to, and saluted as a man to die for, like in these examples:

We can see our safe future in you sir. You are our hope and faith. We can die for you sir. (MODI_B_385)

great very beautifull tiger , sir i respect u very much & i am ready to support u & i can do any thing for u....sir...i wnat u to be the next PM of india plz sir save india..... (MODI_A_568)

only u can save our nation. salute to u sir. (MODI_B_489)

In these comments Modi is described as like a warrior king: one to take his people in numerous battles and returning victorious. Whether these comments speak more of a specifically militant part of Modi's following or of the general nature of his following is unclear, however. A statement like '*We can die for you sir*', however, indicates a very powerful belief in Modi's character and agenda. These followers clearly value Modi's life more than their own lives.

Some comments that leave out the description of the distress Modi is connected to as the only hope and savior, include explicitly religious vocabulary and imagery:

you are showing the road to salvation to all of us....all the best.... (MODI_B_426)

Abhishek Singh Gautam buddh is a lite of Asia. And you r hope of INDIAN People to save fram Panja. (MODI_A_1526)

‘Road to salvation’ can be interpreted as a very religious metaphor. Also the particular addition *‘to all of us’* seems to indicate the belief in Modi as not just a politician of one particular party or not just a savior-like figure to his followers, but to everyone.

As a generalization of all the comments in this category, it can be said that Modi is lifted on a very high pedestal concerning the future of India. Realistically considering, expectations like these could be very hard to accomplish, which could consequently make Modi look like a disappointment in his followers’ eyes. Interestingly it remains to be seen what happens to these beliefs and expectations if Modi is not able to live up to them.

Why was this category the most relevant? Could it be that general agenda of politicians, especially newly elected, as changemakers coincides well with charismatic leaders and the following they can induce in people?

5.4. *‘Vivekananda’s second birth Narendra Modi’* - Modi as a religious figure

In this third category Modi is identified with different Indian religious figures or attributed with specifically religious attributes. In these examples the idea of Modi as either a reincarnation or second coming of a certain religious figure, or as a messenger of god is very prevalent. In the following quote he is compared to Buddha:

Great Persons sacrifice their family life only for the nation just like Lord Buddha and Narendra Modi. (MODI_A_1422)

Modi also often quotes Swami Vivekananda on his Facebook page. Vivekananda (1863-1902) was a significant pioneer of Indian nationalist spirit, who combined religion and nationalism as he preached that India's national greatness was found in its religion. (Embree 2010, 211.) Whether Modi purposefully links himself with Vivekananda is unknown and outside the scope of this study but Nag (2014) comments on this saying that:

'The invocation of the name of Vivekananda for the yatra demonstrates how inventive Modi is... More interestingly, Vivekananda's original name was Narendra Nath Dutta. Modi calculated that this would bring up an invariable comparison with his own first name and in public perception, hopefully transfer some of the sterling qualities of Vivekananda to Modi.' (Nag 2014, 161.)

At least it is evident that some of his followers put him on par with Vivekananda:

Vivekananda's second birth Narendra Modi (MODI_A_854)

In this comment the idea of reincarnation prevalent in many Indian religions is evoked. From this statement it can be deduced that Modi is not just seen as being on par with Vivekananda, but as actually in an even higher position: as if Vivekananda's exemplary life brought him an even more favorable rebirth as Narendra Modi. (Lochtefeld 2002, viii.) This type of commentary where Modi is compared or connected to Vivekananda were few, however. This is surprising considering the amount of Vivekananda references he uses constantly in public appearances and on his Facebook fan page.

The comments included in this category also reflect Willner's formulations about the leader-image dimension. Willner also distinguishes a specific category of responses where the leader is identified with a holy character in the particular cultural context. (Willner 1984, 19.) In the following comments several different religious characters are compared to Modi, with special reference made to Lord Krishna, also describing Modi as a sort of messenger for Lord Krishna. And once again, the idea of reincarnation is also evoked:

U R TRUE INDIAN....Gujrath has given different kind of personality who changed
d way of Thought & defeated bad guys....Eg Lord Krishna ,(no pre defined. Rules
but FOCUS ON TARGET ACHIEVEMENT) .MAHATMA GANDHI: NON-
VIOLENCE.(he choose a diff way to fight Bad guys..Now : Krishna , Mohan or
narendra r all d same name & latest India desperately need an Antivirus ...&May b u
r d Hope of SON OF SOIL OF INDIA....May u b successful.... (MODI_A_1509)

Jai sri radhe.modhi ji dont wait for aneything.lord krishna givan u the chance.take
gud dicesion.watever cums to ur heart (MODI_D_457)

When I saw you at Pashupatinath temple,it made me feel that you are an incarnation
of KRISHNA. (MODI_D_987)

You are sent by GOD (MODI_C_913)

Jai sri radhe.modhi ji dont wait for aneything.lord krishna givan u the chance.take
gud dicesion.watever cums to ur heart (MODI_D_457)

In the following comment two interesting concepts are brought forward. First,
Modi's personality is described as mesmerizing – as in capable of wooing
everyone he meets to join his group of followers. Second, the concept of *sanyasi*
raja is evoked: describing Modi as an ascetic-like devoting himself completely to
ruling (*raja* = royal) his people (See e.g. Lochtefeld 2002, 598). Comments like
these were plenty, and also include references to the epic of Ramayana, and the
idealized form of leadership portrayed in the main character of the Ramayana,
Rama (Lochtefeld 2002, 555–558):

All are mesmerized by his personality Truely a snyasi [sic] Raja (MODI_C_770)

Modi Saheb will direct Whole world and they will follow for RAMRAJYA.
(MODI_D_452)

The Greater India - Ram Rajya is in sight... (MODI_D_1669)

In Indian mythology Rama, the mythological figure from the epic Ramayana, is seen as the model of the ultimate good king. The famous Mahatma Gandhi also held Rama as an exemplary leader in his self-sacrificial nature, i.e. placing his duties to the people ahead of his own wife. Ramraja can be thus seen as referring to a perfect rule.

The following two comments express personal interest in receiving a blessing for Modi. These comments can be, with some certainty, be connected to the darśan tradition:

Mr Modiji i m a follower of yours and interested to meet u personally to get myself blessed . YOU HAVE A DIVINITY IN YOUR EYES. INDIA will definitely have good days ahead. (MODI_D_469)

I have not been able to watch your speech while adresssing our constitutional assembly cuz i live abroad. But, my wife told me that she saw a "bhagwan" in you. We are gurkha. We never accept defeat but you won us. NaMo NaMo. (MODI_D_751)

'*Bhagwan*' or *bhagavan* is an interesting concept usually used as a general describing word for god. Lochtefeld (2002) describes the concept in the following way:

("Blessed One") Name denoting both respect and reverence. In different contexts this name can be used as an epithet of either the god Krishna (as in the Bhagavad Gita) or the god Shiva. In modern usage, at least in northern India, it is also the word that comes closest to expressing the notion of abstract divinity, much like the word "God" in English. It is often used to denote God by Hindus who are religious but who do not worship particular deities. (Lochtefeld 2002, 94.)

This comment could have thus been categorized into the first category of comments, but since it is unclear what bhagavan means in this particular comment, it was grouped in this category. The meaning as the '*Blessed One*' also closely resembles the ideology of the darśan tradition. In these comments, however, it shows how a local cultural setting act as the expression of non-reflective beliefs, in this case the non-reflective beliefs related to charisma.

The next comments are in relation to a specific event, where Modi used 3D projection technology to give a speech without being physically present. They provoke the idea of ‘*avatar*’, basically meaning the descent of a deity (See e.g. Lochtefeld 2002, 72). According to Willner, Gandhi was also seen as an avatar (Willner 1984, 134).

new avatar on this earth.. (MODI_B_1155)

first 3D avatar of a politician in the world. (MODI_B_1161)

3D technology? Probably it means that a 3D image shall be transmitted to a far off place and recreate by way of projection in 3D form... Virtual omni-presence... Reminds of Godly Power (daivi shakti) or Demonic Illusions (mayavi shakti) illustrated in our epics... Futuristic in any case... (MODI_B_1303)

Summarizing the comments in this category, it seems that Modi is linked to religious figures and divinity in many ways in his followers’ perceptions of him. He is referred to as a reincarnation of a religious figure, as a descent of a deity, and as an ascetic-like devotee to be compared with the likes of Rama from Ramayana and Lord Buddha.

5.5. ‘*Modi is the best man born on the earth!!*’ - Modi as a unique human

The next examples are of comments where Modi’s abilities or persona are assessed as superhuman, supernatural or otherwise exceptional. *Religious* in this

category is thus a particularly *etic* definition: also used by Ketola (2008), Willner (1984) and Weber (1964[1925]), however. This category of comments closely follows Willner's formulations of the leader-image dimension's second aspect: the perception of the leader's powers or abilities as exceptional (Willner 1984, 19–23). Just like in the category of treating Modi as savior, this category of followers' religious representations also features characteristics that can be described as militant or *macho*. Examples of this militancy can be seen especially in the following comments:

One man army. Feture of india modi (MODI_A_83)

modi is riyal indian tiger (MODI_A_100)

The lion of gujarat (MODI_A_114)

Many people love to bollywood stars but My Real Hero is Narendra Modi.
(MODI_A_154)

ya this is a lion of GUJARAT now he is redy for hunt' (MODI_A_276)

sir ur such a iron man now a days.....i like ur all act n specially ur agression!!!
(MODI_A_374)

Modi's knowledge and intellect are also described as exceptional. He is titled as 'guru' and as a 'genious':

bright future..... god bless u guru ji..... (MODI_A_1266)

Sir, u r a genius...give us more knowledge... (MODI_A_1297)

In a set of general praises, Modi is thought of as better than anyone else and as

‘*the future of the world*’. The *heman* (or He-Man) title is a macho title he received as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for being tough on Pakistan (Nag 2014, 128–129):

modi ji steel man of the hindu. (MODI_A_1546)

U r the heman of gujarat and future of the world (MODI_A_2030)

Modi is the best man born on the earth!! (MODI_B_19)

U r my best ideal person. (MODI_A_1661)

In the following comment an interesting and unique concept is evoked:

We want Modi Ji as our PM.....he is king of every hindu heart.....jai gujrat..... jai hinDustAni (MODI_B_858)

The representation of Modi as the ‘*king of every Hindu heart*’ or as *Hindu hriday samrat* refers to his background in the Hindu nationalist movement and as a proponent of the Hindutva ideology, and is also a well known title attached to him. (Nag 2014, 135.)

In some comments, a strong emotional commitment to Modi is also evident:

The few things that happened to me yesterday and today have surprised me beyond measure. I waited with interest to see You (Modi) on T V. But as you were about to address our parliament the light went out in my area. But my desire to see and listen to you was so immense that I travelled to my friend's house some 8 kilometers away from my apartment because there was light. Then I gazed at you on TV with pure adoration. When you got down your car and met our people on the street, tears trickled down my cheeks. And today when you boarded the plane and left my country, you left can-never-be-filled emptiness in my heart. (MODI_D_717)

Not only does the writer of this comment express deep admiration of Modi and

an ardent willingness to do what is necessary just to reach him – or just his image in television – the writer also describes in vivid detail the emotional turmoil he/she experienced in the aftermath of Modi's departure²¹. The phrases '*desire to see and listen to you was so immense*' and '*tears trickled down my cheeks*' express a rockstar or prophet-like cult around Modi. Similar emotional reactions are shown in this comment:

it is only a sample...one day world be captured by him...will make us proud...tears comes from my eyes bcoz of happiness....lion roars....stronger modi stronger india..
(MODI_D_1479)

In this category various types of Modi's followers' perceptions of him as either exceptional in his person or by his abilities were introduced. Roughly summarizing the contents of this category it can be said that Modi's is treated as superior by his knowledge and by his strength. Just like in previous categories, a strong element of militancy and machoism is also present.

6. CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis on Narendra Modi's followers' comments on his Facebook fan page a few specific conclusions can be made. First, according to the definitions of charismatic leadership set by Ann Ruth Willner (Willner 1984, 19–23) and explicated in this study in chapter 3, it can be said that Modi has a charismatic following. His followers show attributes of all the four dimensions

²¹ This comment was posted on an update by Modi's Facebook fan page that Modi had visited Nepal.

Willner used to describe charismatic following: leader-image dimension, idea-acceptance dimension, compliance dimension and emotional dimension. Although Modi is a controversial figure and has his haters, he can certainly be said to enjoy a charismatic following, even if the contextual limitations set by Willner to Indian leader reverence and especially the darśan tradition are accounted for (Willner 1984, 32; Ketola 2008, 199).

The second particular observation from this study is that although Modi constantly brings up Swami Vivekananda and his teachings on his fan page, very few people connected Modi to Vivekananda in their comments. The lack of this type of transference, considering all the other religious representations, could be interpreted either as an indication of Modi not generally being treated as an equal to Vivekananda or as the public not being so familiar with Vivekananda, which could more likely be the case.

One intriguing feature in the Facebook comments collected for this study was the fact that many of the comments were directed to Modi himself. Many of the comments gave the impression that the commenter believed his or her comment would actually reach Modi, such as is the case in the comment MODI_A_1336:

Sir , tomorrow, you are reaching there at Patna , i shall be graced to the most if you can bless me with a couple of minutes from your precious and scheduled time.....please sir.....please.....you cant ever guess like what you are for me....please.

The fact that all the topics that were put on the fan page for commenting were added through Narendra Modi's Facebook account certainly makes this belief of reaching him personally somewhat reasonable, but it is more than likely that Modi himself is not operating the fan page, considering his official duties, and that the fan page is run by his media assistants or other public relations personnel. These 'follower-to-leader' comments have in previous studies of charismatic following been limited to personal letters written to the leaders, and have thus been lower in numbers. This gives unique meaning to the study at hand. In comparison, letters could, in all likeliness, give a broader perspective into follower perceptions than

short comments like the ones analysed in this study.

From the point of view of comparing Modi's following when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat and when he was the Prime Minister of India, it seems, that Modi's charismatic following did not at least increase after he was elected as the Prime Minister of India – although no quantitative analysis to explore this was not made. An increase in charismatically oriented commentary would have been a logical assumption following the theoretical background at hand, since his social position changed to a much higher one.

Multiple factors, however, need to be taken into account before making further conclusions about this matter. First, Modi's ascension into the role of Prime Minister attracted a large amount of new followers on his Facebook page. It is possible that a lot of these followers could be categorized as *bandwagon fans* merely following, and thus liking him²² because of his current status and fame, but not being actual supporters of him. In this sense it could be said that the fan page might have experienced a *watering down* effect, the group of true fans and followers of Modi becoming a smaller part of the audience with the emergence of new commenters. This could have affected the collected research material in a significant way. Second, the amount of Modi's Facebook followers was totally different at the beginning of this study compared to what it was when the last two sets of data were gathered. This might have changed the image of the fan page in the followers' minds from, e.g., a place of support and personal interaction with Modi to a general information page on Modi.

Third aspect to take into consideration, and in relation to the second point made, is the fact that because Modi's social position changed to a much higher one, it could have made him somewhat unreachable in the minds of people, in comparison to the situation where he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. If this is the case, then it would be a new insight into the cognitive side of charisma: a position too far from the followers can possibly make the follower-leader connections looser, and the leader more irrelevant to followers in terms of

²² Today, Facebook includes the ability to subscribe to a fan page's news feed without liking the fan page.

emotional commitment and reverence, for example. Taking this idea to the level of study of religion and natural religion, it has to be noted how a somewhat similar result can be witnessed in many religions, too: more than often it is the messengers of a god or the lesser gods that are worshipped and interacted with, rather than the actual high god. Classic examples ofcourse being Jesus, Mohammed, and Virgin Mary, for example. However, further studies are required to determine whether this effect, of activating different kinds of non-reflective beliefs when the leader is extremely far from the followers social position than when the leader is closer to the individual, actually takes place.

Considering the meaning of this study to the particular field of science concerned, the non-reflective beliefs related to charisma, the findings here seem to support both Willner's and Ketola's observations about the types of following included in charismatically oriented following. The most important question, however, still remains: what is the role of culture in these religious representations.? How many of the religious representations directed towards Modi were merely normal Indian expressions toward a prestigious person, thus reflecting the darśan tradition? Did the representations merely express cultural traditions, or were there universal non-reflective beliefs behind them inducing the cultural expressions? Just considering the results of this study, it is very hard to comment on that. However, also taking note of earlier research on charismatic follower orientation, and giving special attention to the passionate depictions of divinity and exceptionality of Modi in the material of this study – a reserved statement in support of Ketola's findings can be made. The similarities between what Willner was able to observe from the following types of leaders of several different cultural milieus and what Ketola's analysis of a deeply religious figure showed, in comparison with the results of this study, are remarkable. The similarities in the cultural expressions make it fairly reasonable to argue – as Ketola, too, argues – that the charismatic follower orientation has its origins in the cognitive background, a set of pan-human biologically determined set of non-reflective beliefs that are activated at least with some leaders, but which are not culture-specific. Further studies from different cultural milieus are still needed, however.

It could be said though, that with all likeliness, just like the animal metaphors about hierarchies and leaders in the quote from Juice Leskinen's song at the start of this paper suggest, humans have instincts, non-reflective beliefs, that make us see at least some leaders as more than human in their person and their abilities. Perhaps looking at a particular leader also activates similar cognitive tendencies of an exceptional being as thinking about a divine figure. At least it is clear from the analysis in this study, that Narendra Modi is treated in multiple ways like a god.

7. DISCUSSION

This study was very fortunate in a sense. Predicting the winning participant in an election is always difficult, and especially for a study where the followers' perceptions of the candidate and the changes into those perceptions after a successful election are studied, it was very fortunate that it was Modi who won the election. In a way, this type of a study that is interested in the social position of the person who has a charismatic following, can not bring insight into the existing theoretical framework of charisma and non-reflective beliefs related to it, unless the subject of the study also experiences a shift in his or her social position.

Above all, conducting this study provided an interesting and enriching window into a particular perspective and context of Indian culture(s). The researcher's role as an outsider in this *netnographic* study was clearly underlined in terms of the political, cultural and religious settings involved. Although I am personally familiar with many aspects of the Indian political system and the religious and cultural nuances, India once again surprised me with the numerous cultural specifics that needed to be understood before understanding the messages on Modi's official Facebook fan page were written to convey. In this sense, the

research material at hand would have also provided a rich analysis for a study from the point of view of social constructionism. In this study, however, looking into all the cultural specifics and their possible meanings would have sidetracked the objective of the study, to gain more information on the cognitive structures underpinning the cultural expressions.

In addition to the language and culture barriers faced analysing the research material, one of the difficulties were also the numerous grammatical obscurities which made understanding the content of the comments very challenging at times. In a comment such as '*u r god to us*' (MODI_D_432) it was hard to differentiate whether *god* was actually meant instead of the word *good*, for example. In cases like these where the meaning of only one word was questionable, the nature of the whole message was considered as measurement for the valid form of the questionable word: the original spellings were treated as correct ones unless there was evidence in the rest of the message to the contrary.

In this study the formulation of Modi's charisma, the effect of his campaigning and public relations work, was left outside the scope of the study. In future research, an interesting view point would also be to take into consideration the intentional formation of charisma along the lines of religious representations. An inquiry into the imagery and ideas that the RSS, for example, is trying to spread of Modi and how Modi himself utilizes this or other religious imagery would in all likelihood provide a rich account of research material. An example of this could be how Modi employs the quotes and persona of Swami Vivekananda, as outlined by Nag (Nag 2014, 161.)

Although the findings of this study in relation to charisma were not groundbreaking or unexpected, as a pioneer netnographic study of charismatic following and the non-reflective beliefs related to it, this study showed that the method of netnography seems to be able to reach basic level concepts relatively easy and suits well into the study of charismatic following. In addition to a qualitative study of the contents of the social media comments, a quantitative study of charismatic following could also be conducted using this method, and could provide a more complete perspective into this phenomenon. A netnographic analysis also seems

well suited for the study of leaders who do not yet have a large following but do have a fan page open for commenting. In previous studies of charismatically oriented follower perceptions the research data has come from sources such as archive materials, memoirs and biographies, which are obviously not available if the subject of the study is a very contemporary figure. Also, the previous studies have not been able to reach so many followers' writings in such a unified form.

One important fact to also take into consideration when reviewing the results of this study, is the forementioned definition of Modi as a secular leader figure. Although he is a secular politician, and not a religious professional, he utilizes a lot of religious appeal. His use of Hindutva and appeal as a devoted Hindu definitely places him close to religious sphere in the minds of people. However, it should also be noted, that Modi is not a religious figure when considering the definitions for religious specialists by Weber, for example: Modi is not a magician, prophet or priest (Weber 1964[1925], 323–329). All in all, it would be more than beneficial for this particular field of study to conduct similar netnographic studies of the leader-followings of overtly secular figures that have no connection at all to religion.

In regards of methodology, another way to conduct this study could have also been to single out the comments with specifically religious representations and then contact those commenters for further interviewing. That could have produced interesting results about how those people reflect on their comments. If the comments with religious representations were made expressing non-reflective beliefs, would the commenters have taken those comments back when reflected upon? This certainly classifies for an important topic for further study.

Also, in this study, there was not too much consideration given to the topics posted on Modi's Facebook fan page – by Modi or by his PR team – under which all the comments were written. Obviously the topics can be seen as having at least some relevance to the comments under them. Since there were many different topics, with various subjects and ideas in them, it was decided, however, that bringing those into the mix could have made the flow of the analysis much harder to follow. It was also acknowledged that many of the comments showed

absolutely no reference to the topics they were posted under but only to Modi or some other issue. This can also be witnessed in the Appendix 1, which shows comments from the the first set of data collected. The comments shown there were posted under a topic where Modi shared a quote '*We must plunge heart and soul and body into the work. And until we be ready to sacrifice everything else to one Idea and to one alone, we never, never will see the light.*' This quote is an example of the nature of some of the topics: it is very general in nature and not meant to open a discussion into some specific issue. Most of the topics are either quotes or just statements of Modi's current affairs. The comments in the Appendix 1 show little to no connection to the quote.

One aspect of source criticism not considered in this study before is evaluating the authenticity of Modi's followers' positive and endorsing comments. Are all the messages genuine expressions of loyal reverence, or are some of those created by a skillful PR team to encourage more and more positive comments, thus benefitting Modi's campaigning? Unfortunately this question is not easy to answer. However, considering the possible damage to Modi's image if artificial commenting like this was discovered, it is reasonably safe to assume that at least the majority of the comments are authentic.

An interesting question to discuss is also the purpose of non-reflective beliefs that imply leaders – at least certain leaders – are more than ordinary people. What could have been the benefit of these beliefs to the solving of evolutionary problems faced by our ancestors? This is all speculation, but the purpose behind these non-reflective beliefs could have been to quicken the decision-making on group level: when the leader's decisions and vision are not questioned, there is little hesitation in following his orders in a do-or-die situation, for example. This could have benefitted the group's survival by making the group more cohesive in its actions. This, as many other aspects of these non-reflective beliefs related to charisma, however, need further exploring and study before proper conclusive statements can be made.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: An excerpt of the collected data

Below is an excerpt of the data collected for this study. This data comes from ‘collection A’ that was collected 6 November 2012. The names of the commenters have been removed, and the indexing numbers are shown after the comments. Unnecessary line breaks have been removed and single quotes and brackets have been added for clarity.

‘we want to fight all 40 seats in bihar sir...’ (MODI_A_858)

‘jai hind’ (MODI_A_859)

‘Dear Modiji, congrats for more than 10,00,000 facebook fans...Best of luck for Gujrat Election..’ (MODI_A_860)

‘Modiji. Italian lady ko vrosto congress balone shir me rakh diya.’ (MODI_A_861)

‘MODIJI v r with u always’ (MODI_A_862)

‘Modi jii... We want you to come forward to lead the nation’ (MODI_A_863)

‘Real hindustani tiger narendra modi’ (MODI_A_864)

‘All Cricket Players, Important Notice! Trials to select for NPL; National Premier League; 10overs Tournament; live on DD Sports. 1st Prize 1 Crores cash! Life Time Opportunity if selected for the teams. Trials will be held on 10/11/2012 Delhi. Call for Registration; +91 9998797598 +91 9992209470 0265 3090 671 www.nplt10.co trials fess rs 400/-’ (MODI_A_865)

‘vote4 modi’ (MODI_A_866)

‘WELCOME BACK SIR,AFTER BUSSY SCHEDULE OF ELECTION
.....tTHNX’ (MODI_A_867)

‘I am respecting you as a new leader hu thinks,eat,drink,even breath about India.....’
(MODI_A_868)

‘Ji...you should adopt some new steps to close the mouth of Congress,who are hunting you in the name of Non Secularism....I like u because of ur vision of India,bcs of the power of ur command,bcs of the development u done in Gujrat.....I m expecting a day wen u r becoming the PM of India,...the time will come....Ur tactics will realise that.....u pls adopt some flexibility infront of others.....Politics needs some Dramas also...u know that.’ (MODI_A_869)

‘Respected Sir, We want to see as PM of Bharathdesh. We will work for you. We pray you to adopt above lines of Vivekanandji to reach that goal. Work for India and just not for Gujarat.’ (MODI_A_870)

‘We must introduce religious studies in schools and colleges and universities. We are only studying in spiritual literature what our ancestors wrote. Advancements have not taken place due to opposition by govts.’ (MODI_A_871)

‘Future pm and president.’ (MODI_A_872)

‘we want PM of INDIA as CM of GUJRAT, waiting & praise 4 d best PM of INDIA ever seen!!!!’ (MODI_A_873)

‘jai gurudev’ (MODI_A_874)

‘jai shree ram’ (MODI_A_875)

‘Modiji will be the bestever PM for India !’ (MODI_A_876)

Appendix 2: A *python* program for indexing social media comments

This *python* program was written to easily index a myriad of collected comments fast. This program makes it possible to index comments in a text file. A prerequisite for the use of this program is that all comments contain a common word at the beginning or at the end of each comment. In this study, all comments had the word *Tykkää*²³ at the end. The program will prompt for the word. In the case of Facebook studies the word 'like' and its equivalents should be the easiest for this purpose. However, if the comments are in English, 'like' might not work in the intended manner since it can with great probability be found inside the comments as well. It is advisable to adjust one's Facebook settings so that the language of the comments is not the same as the language of the Facebook settings. Also, with this program, 'like' or its equivalent must start a line. If there

²³ In English 'Like'.

are other words or symbols before the word 'like', a line-break can be added by using the 'Find-and-Replace' tool in a word processor program. This program indexes the comments with a running number and a custom word that it will prompt when the script is run.

This code must be saved in a *.py format as a plain text file. The code can be run on most systems from a terminal with the command *python *.py* where the asterisk marks the name of the file. This program must be run from the same directory where the unindexed data file is located. The program will prompt for the name of the data file. A backup of the data file should be made before running this program, and special characters and spaces should be avoided in the file name. The code:

```

# Beginning of code

# -*- coding: utf-8 -*-

import fileinput
import itertools

counter = itertools.count(1)

processing_modi = False

print "This is an indexing script for collected Facebook data by Teppo Kupias. 26 March 2013."

print "- This script is for research purposes."

print "- Remember to make a backup of the comment file before proceeding."

print "- Run this script from the folder where the comment file is located."

print "- NOTE: The file with the comments must be in a plain text format such as a *.txt-file."

print "- Avoid special characters and spaces in file names and input words."

print "- You can exit the script by pressing CTRL+C."

filename = raw_input("Give the full name of the comment file to be indexed: ")

print "Give a word that appears at the end of every comment, in Finnish Facebook it's Tykkää(=Like)."

wordname = raw_input("NOTE! Must be the first word of a line: ")

print "Give a word to be put in front of every running number."

indname = raw_input("E.g. MODI_B (B referring to material #2): ")

print "Indexing comments with running numbers...."

for line in fileinput.input(filename, inplace=1):

    if line.startswith(wordname):

        processing_modi = True

    else:

        if processing_modi:

            print '%s_%s' % (indname, next(counter))

            processing_modi = False

        print line,

print "Operation complete. All comments have been indexed."

# End of code

```